



U.S. DEPARTMENT of STATE

Sweden

Country Reports on Human Rights Practices - [2004](#)

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Sweden is a constitutional monarchy with a multiparty parliamentary form of government. The last national elections held in 2002, were free and fair. The Social Democratic Party (SDP) has controlled the Government for 64 of the past 72 years. The King is the largely symbolic head of state, and the Prime Minister is the head of the Government and exercises executive authority. The judiciary is independent.

Police provided internal security and the military provided external security. The civilian authorities maintained effective control of the security forces. There were no reports that security forces committed human rights abuses.

The country had an advanced industrial economy, mainly market based, with a total population of approximately 9 million. Citizens enjoyed a high standard of living, with extensive social welfare services. During the year, the economic growth rate was an estimated 3.3 percent. During the year, the inflation rate was 1.1 percent, down from 2.3 percent in 2003.

The Government generally respected the human rights of its citizens, and the law and judiciary provided effective means of dealing with individual instances of abuse. Anti-Semitic crimes were a problem. Violence against women and child abuse were problems. Trafficking in women and children was a problem. Societal discrimination against foreign-born residents and homosexuals was a problem.

RESPECT FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

Section 1

Respect for the Integrity of the Person, Including Freedom From:

a. Arbitrary or Unlawful Deprivation of Life

There were no reports of the arbitrary or unlawful deprivation of life committed by the Government or its agents.

b. Disappearance

There were no reports of politically motivated disappearances.

c. Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman, or Degrading Treatment or Punishment

The law prohibits such practices, and there were no reports that government officials employed them.

During the year, the police officer charged with the 2001 wounding of three protesters was acquitted by the district court. The prosecution appealed the case to the Court of Appeal, which upheld the district court acquittal in November.

Prison conditions generally met international standards; however, the Council of Europe (COE) criticized the country for increasingly poor prison conditions, especially in the region of Stockholm where there were overcrowding and lengthy detention periods, often longer than the statutory 7 days.

Men and women prisoners were held separately. Juveniles were held separately from adults, and convicted criminals and pretrial detainees were held separately.

The Government permitted visits by independent human rights observers, although there were no such visits during the year.

d. Arbitrary Arrest or Detention

The Constitution prohibits arbitrary arrest and detention, and the Government generally observed these prohibitions.

There is a national-level police force divided into 12 districts, each of which reports to a National Police Board under jurisdiction of the Ministry of Justice. There were no reports of corruption or of problems related to impunity. Police recruitment policy sought to increase the number of women and augment ethnic diversity in the force.

The law requires warrants for arrests. Police must file charges within 6 hours against persons detained for disturbing the public order or considered dangerous and within 12 hours against those detained on other grounds. Police may hold a person for questioning for 6 hours, although the period may be extended to 12 hours if necessary for the investigation. If the person is a suspect, police must decide whether to arrest or release the person. If the suspect is arrested, the prosecutor has 24 hours (or 3 days in exceptional circumstances) to request detention. An arrested suspect must be arraigned within 48 hours, and initial prosecution must begin within 2 weeks, unless extenuating circumstances exist. Detainees routinely were released pending trial unless they were considered dangerous.

e. Denial of Fair Public Trial

The Constitution provides for an independent judiciary, and the Government generally respected this provision in practice.

The judicial system is composed of three levels: District Courts, a Court of Appeals, and a Supreme Court. All cases are heard first in a district court regardless of the severity of the alleged crime. For some areas, there are specialized courts, such as labor, water, real estate, and market courts. These courts usually are the second and last instance for trial after the district court.

The Constitution provides for the right to a fair trial, and an independent judiciary generally enforced this right. The court system distinguishes between civil and criminal cases. Defendants enjoy a presumption of innocence and have a right of appeal. Defendants in civil cases have the right to defend themselves or to hire an attorney. In criminal cases, the Government is obligated to provide a defense attorney if the defendant cannot afford one. A "free evidence" system allows parties to present in court any evidence, regardless of how it has been acquired. The legal system does not provide for release on bail. All trials are public. Juries are used only in cases involving freedom of the press or freedom of speech. In other cases judges or court-appointed civilian representatives make determinations of guilt or innocence.

There were no reports of political prisoners.

f. Arbitrary Interference with Privacy, Family, Home, or Correspondence

The Constitution prohibits such actions, and the Government generally respected these prohibitions in practice.

Section 2

Respect for Civil Liberties, Including:

a. Freedom of Speech and Press

The Constitution provides for freedom of speech and of the press, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice and did not restrict academic freedom.

The law prohibits hate speech that makes "agitation against ethnic groups" a crime. Under this law, neo Nazi groups were not permitted to display signs and banners with provocative symbols at their rallies (see Section 5). In July, Pentecostal Pastor Ake Green was convicted under this law in connection with a sermon in which he voiced condemnation of homosexuality. He was sentenced to 1 month's imprisonment; he has appealed the verdict on the basis of freedom of speech.

The independent media were active and expressed a wide variety of views without government restriction. The Government did not restrict Internet access.

b. Freedom of Peaceful Assembly and Association

The Constitution provides for freedom of assembly and association, and the Government generally respected these rights in practice.

c. Freedom of Religion

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respected this right in practice. The Government did not prohibit the practice or teaching of any faith.

The Swedish Commission for State Grants to Religious Communities financed 39 religious groups in 2003, the vast majority were Christian churches, and the remainder were four Islamic organizations and the Jewish community. The Swedish Buddhist Cooperation Council (Sveriges Buddhistiska Samarbetsrad) protested that it has not received such funding and that it was not represented on the Government's Council for Contact with Religious Communities.

According to police statistics, the number of reported anti-Semitic hate crimes has increased since the end of the 1990s, averaging approximately 130 annually during the period 2000 to 2003. During 2003, 128 anti-Semitic crimes were reported; of these, 3 were classified as assaults, 52 as agitation against an ethnic group, and 35 as unlawful threat or harassment. There have been a number of high profile incidents in Malmö. For example, in March, stones were thrown at employees of the Jewish Burial Society at a Jewish cemetery. During the past few years, the Government has taken steps to combat anti-Semitism by increasing awareness of Nazi crimes and the Holocaust.

Since 2001, anti-Muslim incidents appeared to have increased. The office of the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination confirmed that a number of Muslim women had reported incidents where they believed that they have been discriminated against because they wore headscarves. A court determined that discrimination did not take place in a ruling of a 2003 case in which the defendant alleged she had been denied employment because she wore a headscarf for religious reasons. The police were not able to identify the perpetrators of the arson committed against the Islamic school and the Islamic Center in Malmö in April 2003.

The Jehovah's Witnesses and members of various smaller Christian churches reported incidents of discrimination during the past few years.

For a more detailed discussion, see the [2004 International Religious Freedom Report](#).

d. Freedom of Movement Within the Country, Foreign Travel, Emigration, and Repatriation

The law provides for these rights, and the Government generally respected them in practice.

The Constitution prohibits forced exile, and the Government did not employ it.

The law provides for the granting of asylum or refugee status in accordance with the 1951 U.N. Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees or its 1967 Protocol, and the Government has established a system for providing protection to refugees. In practice, the Government provided protection against refoulement, the return of persons to a country where they feared persecution. The Government granted refugee status or asylum. The Government cooperated with the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees and other humanitarian organizations in assisting refugees. The Government also provided temporary protection to individuals who may not qualify as refugees under the 1951 Convention/1967 Protocol.

The number of asylum seekers decreased slightly: 23,116 persons sought asylum, compared with 31,355 in 2003. Of the total number of asylum seekers, 4,022 were from Serbia and Montenegro, 1,456 from Iraq, 1,041 from Azerbaijan, and 905 from Somalia. The Government approved 6,140 applications during the year. Applications could remain under consideration for long periods of time with applicants in uncertain status. The appeals process in the courts may extend cases for several years, although there were few such cases.

The U.N. Committee against Torture received three new cases against the Government during the year, all of which were related to denial of applications for political asylum and consequent repatriations to countries where victims allegedly faced a risk of torture. During the year, the committee ruled on five cases and found that, in each case, the country had not violated the rights of the petitioners.

The Government expeditiously returned asylum seekers from European Union (EU) countries or from countries with which there were reciprocal return agreements. In most cases, persons who were returned expeditiously had passed through or had asylum determinations pending in other EU countries. In many cases, asylum seekers were deported within 72 hours of arrival. The Government experimented with pilot programs at selected border crossings to provide expeditious legal assistance, a concern raised by some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). The Government's accelerated asylum procedures drew criticism from various NGOs. The Government reported an increase in the percentage of asylum applications it denied. Human rights organizations expressed concern that some asylum cases were adjudicated too quickly and that claimants were sometimes denied access to legal aid and forcibly returned to their home country where they feared persecution. Concern was also expressed for the protection of individual (unaccompanied) children seeking asylum.

The 2001 repatriation of two Egyptians gained attention during the year as the result of allegations that the deportees were subjected to torture in Egypt. Public criticism from human rights organizations and political parties sparked calls for a parliamentary inquiry into the legality of the deportations, as well as into alleged police brutality and alleged improper cooperation with a foreign country in the deportations. The Parliamentary Ombudsman opened an investigation of this incident by year's end.

Section 3

Respect for Political Rights: The Right of Citizens to Change Their Government

The Constitution provides citizens with the right to change their government peacefully, and citizens exercised this right in practice through periodic, free, and fair elections held on the basis of universal suffrage.

Elections to the 349-member unicameral Parliament are held every 4 years; the last elections, which were generally free and fair, were held in September 2002. The SDP has dominated the political system for the past 7 decades, and SDP members occupied a disproportionately large number of publicly appointed positions. The Swedish Trade Union Confederation continued to provide significant financial and organizational support to the SDP.

The law provides for public access to government information, and the Government generally respected this in practice. The public has the right to access government documents unless they were subject to secrecy laws, according to which information may be withheld if its release posed a threat to national security and individual or corporate privacy.

Women were approximately 45 percent of the 349-seat Parliament and 50 percent of the 22-member Cabinet.

The Parliament included representatives of the principal religious, ethnic, and immigrant groups; however, Parliament does not provide information on the number of minorities serving in it. There were 4 minorities in the 22 member Cabinet: 1 Turkish-Assyrian, 2 Estonians, and 1 Jewish member.

Section 4

Governmental Attitude Regarding International and Nongovernmental Investigation of Alleged Violations of Human Rights

A number of domestic and international human rights groups generally operated without government restrictions, investigating and publishing their findings on human rights cases. Government officials were very cooperative and responsive to their views.

The Parliamentary Ombudsman investigates and publicizes abuses of government authority at the national and local level and initiates actions to rectify such abuses. This institution, provided for in the Constitution, constitutes a form of parliamentary control over the executive. Any person may file a complaint with the Parliamentary Ombudsman's Office. In addition to the Parliamentary Ombudsman, there are the following 6 government-appointed ombudsmen: The Consumer Ombudsman, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman, the Ombudsman against Ethnic Discrimination, the Ombudsman against Discrimination because of Sexual Orientation, the Children's Ombudsman, and the Disability Ombudsman. Press organizations jointly finance a Press Ombudsman, empowered to investigate violations of newspaper practices. The Swedish Institute, a government-funded entity to promote knowledge about the country, reported that the Parliamentary Ombudsman's office handled approximately 5,000 complaints per year, of which 20 to 25 percent resulted in full investigations.

Section 5

Discrimination, Societal Abuses, and Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits discrimination based on disability, ethnicity, religion, or sexual preference, and the Government effectively enforced these provisions.

Women

Violence against women remained a problem. The National Council for Crime Prevention reported 22,669 cases of assault against women. Most involved spousal abuse. An average of 30 murders of women and girls are reported each year, half of them by men closely related to the victim. Authorities apprehended and prosecuted abusers. The typical sentence for abuse was a prison term (14 months on average) or psychiatric treatment. Unlike in the previous year, women's organizations did not complain about short sentences and early release of offenders.

Rape is illegal, and the law does not differentiate between spousal and nonspousal rape. The law stipulates higher sanctions for repeated crimes if the perpetrator had a close relation to the victim. The National Council for Crime Prevention reported 2,141 rapes of persons over age 14, compared with 1,851 in 2003. The law provides that rape may be prosecuted as sexual assault instead of the more serious crime of rape, based on a determination of the level of resistance offered by the victim.

The law provides complainants with protection from contact with their abusers. In some cases, authorities helped women obtain new identities and homes. The Government provided electronic alarms or bodyguards for women in extreme danger of assault. Both national and local governments helped fund volunteer groups that provided shelter and other assistance to abused women, and both private and public organizations ran shelters. A number of NGOs and local government authorities operated hotlines for victims of crime, and police were trained to deal with violence against women.

The Government continued to focus on honor killings and provided protected housing for young women vulnerable to honor-related violence from family members. In December, the Government hosted a 2-day international conference "Combating Patriarchal Violence against Women - Focusing on Violence in the Name of Honor."

The law specifically prohibits the purchase or attempted purchase of sexual services.

Trafficking in women for purposes of sexual exploitation was a problem (see Section 5, Trafficking).

Sexual harassment was a problem. The law prohibits sexual harassment; employers who do not investigate and intervene against harassment at work may be obliged to pay damages to the victim. As with other forms of discrimination, women and men may file complaints with the courts or their unions.

Employers are required by law to treat men and women alike in hiring, promotion, and pay, including equal pay for comparable work. Some sectors of the labor market still showed significant gender disparities, many with a strong preponderance of either men or women. During the year, women's salaries averaged 84 percent of men's salaries, adjusting for age, education, and occupational differences. To combat gender discrimination in the long term, the Equal Opportunities Act requires employers, in both public and private sectors, to promote actively equal opportunities for women and men in the workplace. The Equal Opportunity Ombudsman, a public official, investigates complaints of gender discrimination in the labor market. Complaints may also be filed with the courts or with the employer, with mediation by the employee's labor union. During the year, the Equal Opportunities Ombudsman's office registered 126 cases. Women filed approximately 81 percent of the cases, and 34 percent concerned salary issues. The number of discrimination complaints related to pregnancy fell to 19, compared with 30 in 2003.

Children

The Government was strongly committed to children's rights and welfare; it amply funded systems of public education and medical care. An official Children's Ombudsman monitored the Government's programs. The Government provided compulsory, free, and universal education for children age 9 to 16. It also provided free medical care for all children up to the age of 16.

Child abuse was a problem. During the year, the National Council for Crime Prevention reported 8,198 cases of abuse of children under the age of 15. There were 467 reported cases of rape, and 1,400 reported cases of sexual abuse of children, compared with 332 reported cases of rape and 1,043 reported cases of child sexual abuse in 2003.

The law prohibits parents or other caretakers from abusing children mentally or physically in any way. Parents, teachers, and other adults are subject to prosecution if they physically punish a child, including slapping or spanking. Children have the right to report such abuses to the police. The usual sentence for such an offense is a fine combined with counseling and monitoring by social workers. Authorities may remove children from their homes and place them in foster care. Foster parents seldom receive permission to adopt long-term foster children, even in cases where the biological parents were seen as unfit or sought no contact with the child. Unlike in the previous year, critics did not charge that this policy placed the rights of biological parents over the needs of children for security in permanent family situations.

The Government allocated funds to private organizations concerned with children's rights. The NGO Children's Rights in Society offered counseling to troubled youngsters. The Government continued to be active internationally in efforts to prevent child abuse.

Trafficking in Persons

The law prohibits trafficking in persons; however, there were reports that persons were trafficked to, through, and within the country.

The Government continued to place a high priority on combating trafficking despite its relatively low incidence in the country. The law prohibits the trafficking of persons for sexual purposes, provides for sentences of 2 to 10 years' imprisonment for persons convicted of trafficking, and criminalizes attempting to traffic, conspiracy to traffic, and the failure to report such crimes. During the year, amendments to the law made it applicable to forced labor and the trade in human organs, also, the trafficking definition no longer requires the element of cross border activity.

To prosecute traffickers, authorities primarily continued to use laws against procurement and an offense called "placing in distress," which can be used in cases where traffickers lure women from other countries under false pretenses. During the year, there were 97 cases of procurement reported, many involving trafficking victims. Traffickers sentenced for procurement faced up to 6 years in prison, but most sentences were for 2 to 3 years' imprisonment.

According to police, the country remained primarily a trafficking destination, although it also served as a transit point for women and children. Police reported that between 400 and 600 women were trafficked to the country every year, coming primarily from the Baltic region, Eastern Europe, or Russia. Those transiting the country came primarily from the Baltic region, and the principal destination countries were Spain, Germany, Denmark, and Norway. There have been occasional cases of trafficked women from South America and Thailand. Police reported eight cases of child trafficking, involving victims ages 16 and 17. Most of these children were trafficked from Estonia with one from Moldova and one from Vietnam.

Women typically were recruited in their own countries to work as cleaners, babysitters, or in similar employment. Once in the country, victims were isolated and intimidated by traffickers and forced to work as prostitutes in hotels, restaurants, massage

parlors, or private apartments; some were even locked up and had their passports confiscated.

The Government allocated funds to domestic and international NGOs for providing shelter to victims and aid in rehabilitation; the police and social services also provided funding. In October, new legislation came into force enabling trafficking victims to receive temporary residence permits to allow better care for victims and to facilitate police investigations. Prior to the October legislation, in most cases, trafficking victims were deported immediately. A new statutory amendment entitles trafficking victims to full social benefits while their cases are being investigated. The National Police Board launched a 1 year project to look into the problem of trafficked children.

Persons with Disabilities

The law prohibits employers from discriminating against persons with disabilities in hiring decisions and prohibits universities from discriminating against students with disabilities in making admission decisions. No other specific laws prohibit discrimination against persons with disabilities. There is an Ombudsman for Disability Issues.

The Government provides for freedom of access and social support as basic rights for citizens with disabilities. Regulations for new buildings require full accessibility, but there is no such requirement for existing public buildings, except for certain public entities that are obliged to make their facilities accessible. Many buildings and some public transportation remained inaccessible.

National/Racial/Ethnic Minorities

Approximately 12 percent of the population is foreign born, with the largest groups from Finland, Iraq, Iran, and the former Yugoslavia. In 2003, there were 2,308 reports of xenophobic crimes of which 417 were related to neo-Nazism. The total number of reported crimes connected with a racist motive numbered 1,539, an increase over the 1,374 committed in 2002. The Government investigated and prosecuted race related crimes. Most estimates placed the number of active neo-Nazis, or white supremacists, at fewer than 3,000, and there appeared to be little popular support for their activities or sentiments. However, during the year, Expo (an NGO that tracks xenophobic groups) upgraded their estimates of white supremacists to between 4,000 and 5,000. Expo also estimated the number of active domestic neo-Nazis with serious criminal backgrounds, a high propensity for violence, and a potential for terrorist activity at around 50.

Approximately 1,400 persons attended an annual rally held in December, organized by the Salem Foundation (a neo-Nazi organization), commemorating the 2000 killing of a 17-year-old neo-Nazi sympathizer by immigrant youths. Neo-Nazi groups operated legally, but courts have held that it is illegal to wear xenophobic symbols or racist paraphernalia or to display signs and banners with provocative symbols at rallies, since the law prohibits incitement of hatred against ethnic groups.

During the year, several demonstrations against violence and racism were organized throughout the country. The Government supported volunteer groups that opposed racism and xenophobia and allocated funding for projects supporting those who have left neo-Nazi organizations.

The Ombudsman for Ethnic Discrimination received reports of 727 cases of discrimination during the year.

The law recognizes the Sami people, Swedish Finns, Tornedal Finns, Roma, and Jews as national minorities. The Government supported and protected minority languages. In response to a 2003 COE report that criticized government efforts to protect minority languages, Parliament initiated (at the Government's request) an investigation of ways to improve the status of the Finnish language in the greater Stockholm and Malar regions. Also in response to the COE report, the Government tasked a Parliamentary committee on media support to examine ways to improve support for Sami and Meankili minority-language newspapers. The School Authority also initiated an assessment of the role of minority languages in schools. In March, the Government released a report concluding a 2 year study on the situation of the Roma, which described the human rights situation for Roma in the country as unacceptable and indicated that their knowledge of their rights was limited.

The number of complaints reported by Roma to the Office of the Ombudsman for Ethnic Discrimination appeared to increase in 2003; most were related to poor treatment by government authorities and refusal of entry to restaurants or stores.

Indigenous People

There were between 17,000 and 20,000 Sami (formerly known as Lapps and officially recognized in 2000 as a national minority) in the country. In March, the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination criticized the Government for its failure to address Sami rights to land. In May, an EU human rights report reiterated the main points of the U.N. Committee's findings and criticized the Government for not having resolved issues surrounding the Sami rights to both land and water. During the last few years, reports to the Ombudsman Against Ethnic Discrimination have primarily come from Sami not belonging to a Sami village, since they do not enjoy the same hunting and fishing entitlements as Sami belonging to Sami villages. In 2003, there was a case of a Sami man, who was denied shared custody of his child on the grounds of his lifestyle as a reindeer herder.

The Sami Parliament acted as an advisory body to the Government. During the year, the Government funded and began

construction on a national information center for Sami issues.

Other Societal Abuses and Discrimination

Societal violence and discrimination against homosexuals was a problem. In 2003, 326 crimes with homophobic motive were reported to the police, a sizable increase from 2002.

Section 6 Worker Rights

a. The Right of Association

The law entitles workers to form and join unions of their choice, and workers exercised this right in practice. Approximately 80 percent of the workforce was unionized.

b. The Right to Organize and Bargain Collectively

The law allows unions to conduct their activities without interference, and the Government protected this right in practice. The law provides for collective bargaining, and workers exercised this right in practice. The law provides for the right to strike, as well as for employers to organize and to conduct lockouts, and workers exercised this right in practice. Within limits protecting the public's immediate health and security, public employees also enjoy the right to strike. There are no export processing zones.

c. Prohibition of Forced or Compulsory Labor

The law prohibits forced or compulsory labor, including by children; however, there were reports that such practices occurred (see Section 5).

d. Prohibition of Child Labor and Minimum Age For Employment

The law permits full-time employment at age 16 under the supervision of local authorities. Employees under age 18 may work only during the daytime and under supervision. Children as young as 13 years may work part-time or in "light" work with parental permission. Union representatives, police, and public prosecutors effectively enforced these restrictions.

e. Acceptable Conditions of Work

There is no national minimum wage law. Wages were set by collective bargaining contracts every year, which nonunion establishments usually observed as well. Even the lowest-paid workers were able to maintain a decent standard of living for themselves and their families through substantial benefits (such as housing or daycare support) provided by social welfare entitlement programs.

The legal standard workweek is 40 hours or less. Both the law and collective bargaining agreements regulate overtime and rest periods. The law requires a minimum period of 36 consecutive hours of rest, preferably on weekends, during a period of 7 days. The law also provides employees with a minimum 5 weeks' paid annual leave.

Occupational health and safety rules were set by a government appointed board, the Work Environment Authority, and monitored by trained union stewards, safety ombudsmen, and, occasionally government inspectors. Safety ombudsmen have the authority to stop unsafe activity immediately and to call in an inspector. These rules were effectively enforced and work places were generally safe and healthy. In law and practice, workers could remove themselves from situations that endangered their health or safety without jeopardizing their future employment.